

Eaglehawk Uniting Church
Sunday 10th March 2013
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LOST !!!

Psalm 32 and Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32

My first question when reading the Luke lectionary, was - what happened to the other parables about lost things - lost sheep and the lost coin. Why the gap in the story?? Both very short sections - 7 verses together, then goes into much more detail with His next parable about the lost son - 22 verses. But they're all lost things - RIGHT??? So why only the parable of the prodigal son??

The second question was why this reading was plonked into the middle of the season of Lent?? What's this got to do with our preparation for Easter?? A few weeks ago at Marong I was talking about the need as Christians to use some sort of navigation system to know where you're going, and the fact that sometimes even without these systems, or when we ignore their advice, we still get lost and need to find our way back to God.

If we look a bit closer at all three stories of 'LOST' - the coin definitely didn't have any contribution to getting lost - that was possibly an accident, or carelessness??, the sheep - possibly contributed to getting lost by pushing through the fence - but was the gate left open by a careless shepherd or chased away by a dog, or stolen by someone who wanted some free mutton, but the Son made a very conscious decision remove himself from the presence of his father; in effect, to GET LOST...

The important thing here is that this is a parable - a story for us to hear and identify with the characters. Which character do you identify with?? Maybe it's different each time you hear the story?? Maybe it's different depending on your circumstances. We might at first glance think that it's only the youngest son who is the one who has been lost, but in reading more, I've been challenged to see that there are different ways of being LOST...

LOST - not won (having been given a bad deal)

Do we demand things from God?? Things that we think that as a Christian we have a right to have, or be. That's exactly what the younger son demanded of his father. He couldn't wait until he inherited his share, he wanted what would be his - RIGHT NOW!!! He gave little thought to how this would impact on his father, or his brother, or the others of the household. I wonder what he would have done if

his father had said 'NO'??? That would have been a different parable!! He wasn't compelled to just because the son asked - and it certainly wasn't how property would have usually been managed in that time and culture. The Father lost the younger son as part of his family as well as having lost some of his property. And what about the older son - when his brother came home again, he certainly felt that he had lost - lost his father's attention, possibly lost more of the property if it had to be divided again, certainly lost control of his emotions.

Think about the times you feel hard done by... it's usually when you have an expectation of someone else, and their decision or action isn't what you think it should be. At that point, we have a choice - to sulk and winge that it's 'not fair', or look for the way to use this to our advantage and get on with whatever it is that God is wanting from us. Read Psalm 32 v10 again - 'Many are the torments of the (wicked/God-defiers), but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.' No matter what the situation, God can make it work for us, if we are willing to trust God, and accept the love that is freely given by God.

We can hold onto ideas of what think is right without stopping to consider different perceptions - our 'win and lose' is never the only way to see a situation. Let go of the negative, work a way around or over the barriers and get on with it.

LOST - wandered from the way (gone off the tracks)

The son took his money and went on his way - according to 'the Message' translation in v13 the younger son 'there undisciplined ... , he wasted everything he had.' He made no plans and had no strategies for what he needed to do to survive; living from day to day, possibly with no thought about what he would do once the money ran out. This was his choice so it's easy to say, well that's the choice he made and needs to accept the consequences. But it's the way things often happen when there's no planning. We're not given a time of how long it took him to waste all he'd gained, but it never is overnight, it's bit by bit, and step by step. One step off the path is easy to get back from, but one step, and another, and another, and then around a corner, and all of a sudden, we're completely off track and can't see a way back.

Again we can go to the Psalm v 8-9 - 'I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.' We have so much to point us in the right direction - our teachers and leaders, the bible and so many authors and their interpretations, and of course the actions of Jesus and his interactions with the world. It must be our desire to be guided by God - to be willing to be corrected and drawn back to

God's ways rather than feeling overwhelmed by the lost-ness and feeling 'too far gone' and unable to return God.

Let go of the fear of not being able to return, of being too far away from safety. Accept God as your hiding place as described in the Psalm, wherever you are and whatever the situation.

LOST - worthless, destroyed or ruined (not worthy of consideration)

Think about what is left after a fire or other disaster. The things that are precious are all gone, we have only our memories. In the parable, the family had been torn apart by the division of the property, and the departure of the youngest son. The father, because of the son's demand, may have felt worthless because the inference being made is that the father is already dead to the son - he wants nothing further to do with the family, but to get what's his and go. The situation faced by all of them now is so totally different to before. How often is that the case for us - things change, we lose control of the situation and we feel our whole world is crashing down around us.

Think again of the younger son - in a foreign country, no money, no home, feeding pigs, considering joining them to feed from their trough - that would have been very lowest of low for a Jew. He got to the point where he had practiced his speech over and over, asking his father to please take him back as a servant. He 'came to his senses', but was he truly sorry for what he had done, or was he just willing to wear the consequences and at least get fed properly. But it's a totally different response that he gets from his father, and it's that response that makes the older brother feel that the situation has been turned upside down. After the time that he's spent working and being there for his father, that feeling of being unworthy is summed up in v29 - my paraphrase - 'I've put in the hard yards, stayed here to help you with the farm, and what thanks do I get - a party for my no good run-away brother??' This section is much more about the response of the older son than the sincerity or not of the younger son.

Let go of that feeling of worthlessness, because you are loved by the creator of heaven and earth. How much more special do you need to be???

The joy of the father in this parable is the same joy of the woman when she found the lost coin, and the shepherd when he found his lost sheep. This is the joy of God when we acknowledge that we are LOST (in whatever way that is), and we turn back guilty and ashamed and find the free forgiveness of God.

Go back to the beginning of this parable - Luke verse 11 - "There was a man who had two sons" Will you be the son who returned and begged to be received back onto the estate, or the son who was unimpressed and annoyed at the fuss that was being made??

I'd like to invite you to consider the two sons and reflect on what each one needed to face, and let go of, to be able to experience the full relationship and joy of the father. Listen to a short presentation and think about what you might need to let go of to return to a full relationship with God.

Resources

Alexander, P & D. (2009). *The Lion Handbook to the Bible. 4th edition.* Oxford: Wilkinson House.

Hultgren A.J. http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?lect_date=3/10/2013&tab=4

http://www.workingpreacher.org/dear_wp.aspx?article_id=672

Mc Kenzie A.M. <http://www.patheos.com/Progressive-Christian/Prodigal-Son-Alyce-McKenzie-03-04-2013.html>

Rockwell N. <http://biteintheapple.com/lost/>

All internet links accessed March 2013